

SOUTH
WINDSOR
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS
DEPARTMENT OF FOOD
SERVICES

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To provide quality, healthful school meals and nutritious snack choices while encouraging good nutrition practices as an integral part of the education of our students.

Testimony of Mary Ann Lopez, SNS, before the Education Subcommittee of the
Appropriations Committee
March 3, 2015

**HB06824 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2017, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR
AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATED TO REVENUE.**

Good evening Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Mary Ann Lopez and I am a past president and active member of the School Nutrition Association of Connecticut and the School Food Service Director of South Windsor Public Schools. I am also a resident of West Hartford.

The School Nutrition Association of CT (SNACT) is comprised of school foodservice and nutrition professionals who are committed to advancing good nutrition for all children, providing healthful meals and nutrition education on a daily basis.

I would like to address the elimination of the Healthy Foods Initiative which is the funding school districts' food service operations receive for voluntarily implementing the CT Nutrition Standards which currently exceed USDA regulations recently implemented nationally. In the 163 CT schools who choose to participate in the program the food service operation receives an additional \$0.10 per meal served to support our program efforts to provide healthy, appealing meals to our students. This funding is extremely important to all districts participating because it goes beyond snacks and fundraising activities and influences the overall school wellness environment within each district. South Windsor Schools has been participating since 2007.

For years, Connecticut and our school nutrition programs have been proud leaders on the national front, providing meals and snacks that exceed federal nutrition standards. When Healthy Food Certification was adopted in 2006, CT led the nation in landmark legislation for high nutrition standards for foods sold in schools both within our food services programs and outside the school cafeteria as well as school fundraisers. Eliminating this program undermines Connecticut as a leader

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in school nutrition and wellness and impacts how we serve the students of Connecticut's public schools.

Let me explain a little about how our programs are financed. School Food Service Departments are expected to be self-sufficient. Our income is dependent upon reimbursements from both the federal government and state matching fund, along with the cash sales at each register for student meals and a la carte. When food costs increase, as they do on an annual basis in our homes and businesses, we are forced to figure out how to meet nutritional guidelines without increases in our budgets. If the school nutrition program is not able to be self-sufficient, the local Board of Education must meet the budget shortfall which takes away funds from student education.

Many of CT school districts have been forced to rely heavily on our a la carte sales to balance our budgets. Healthy Food Certification has provided districts a structured, well vetted system for determining what a la carte items we sell which significantly increase the nutritional value of these snack and a la carte foods, assuring families that their students are learning to make healthier choices. CT state officials from the Child Nutrition unit of the department of education have developed clear, well founded guidelines and a list of items which meet the standards of HFC. Eliminating the funding would impact our ability as food service directors to make sound decisions on the items we can offer a la carte as the maintenance of the information provided currently by the state agency may be in jeopardy.

The HFC funding to school districts allows us to provide a wider variety of fresh fruit and vegetable options, many grown closer to home, and encourage students to select the fully balanced meal. With the increase in fresh produce being offered, districts have seen an increase in the number of students choosing and consuming that fruit or vegetable option. Much of the fresh produce provided is local and regionally grown, helping to support the local economy. However, this effort takes adequate funding. Districts dependent on the HFC funds will be left to struggle with how to continue offering fresh produce daily.

School foodservice directors across Connecticut recognize the challenges faced when it comes to high rates of childhood obesity, hunger and the lack of a balanced diet. We are committed to working hard to assist in the effort to provide our kids with affordable, healthy, fresh, and delicious food options. Discontinuing Healthy Food Certification funding is a disservice to the health and well-being of students of Connecticut. I join SNACT in strongly urging you to reject the Governor's budget proposal to eliminate the Healthy Foods Initiative.

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